



**Book Review: A Community of Europeans?  
Transnational Identities and Public Spheres, Thomas  
Risse, Cornell University Press 2010**

Sophie Duchesne

► **To cite this version:**

Sophie Duchesne. Book Review: A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres, Thomas Risse, Cornell University Press 2010. West European Politics, 2011, 34 (4), pp.884-86. halshs-00652455

**HAL Id: halshs-00652455**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00652455>**

Submitted on 16 Dec 2011

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Cornell University Press, 2010.

Review for *West European Politics*, version de l'auteure publiée dans le vol.34, n°4, July 2011, 884-86

Sophie Duchesne (CNRS/Sciences Po, Centre d'études européennes)

*Thomas Risse is a well-known figure for Europeanist circles. A Community of Europeans? , which offers a comprehensive approach to Europeanised identities and public spheres, will become a reference on integration. However, Risse's strong commitment to European integration impacts on his analysis and makes him consider with contempt the losers of European integration.*

Thomas Risse is a well-known figure for Europeanist circles. Professor of International Relations (at the Freie Universität Berlin), he has also been writing about European attitudes towards integration for many years. He coordinates several research projects and networks on European integration more broadly. There is no doubt that *A Community of Europeans?* , which offers a comprehensive approach to Europeanised identities and public spheres, will become a reference on integration for students and academics, but also for an astute Europhile public.

Rather than being based on new research, this book rightly tries to make sense of the great number of recent publications dealing with attitudes towards European integration and offers a new and very personal reflection on them. This is much more than an overview of the current literature however, as it is driven by a clear and central thesis: identities and public spheres in the EU have become and/or are becoming europeanised, (at least in Western European countries and with the exception of Britain), as a consequence of European integration. Risse deals with an impressive range of research and references, not hesitating on occasion to reinterpret some of the results he presents, even if contrary to their authors' conclusions, according to the concepts he elaborates.

By clearly focusing the discussion on the Europeanisation of identities and the public sphere, Risse draws a line under a long and ultimately sterile discussion on European identity and the public sphere. Clearly, neither can pre-exist the EU and if they ever come to exist, they will have been constructed along the road to integration. In order to understand what is happening in Europe, we need intelligent concepts that draw both from political theory and from empirical observation. We know, from all the work that has been produced on European integration, that only a tiny minority of people identify as "only European", whereas the majority respond that they feel "both national and European". We also know that although the major media outlets in Europe are nationally owned and run, and appear in different national languages, this does not mean that they do not address similar issues regarding integration or do not pay attention to each other. Thus Risse rightly argues that we need to focus on the Europeanisation of identities and public spheres as a process that may generate attitudes and public opinion supportive of the European political community. As such, the book is an important step in European studies.

Risse then goes a step further. By skilfully combining cases studies and various research results dealing with many different national cases and dimensions of the public sphere, he addresses the currently much debated question of the politicisation of European issues. His argument again is that we should not expect Europeanisation to emerge from consensual acceptance of outputs and

institutions, but rather understand that it is both produced by and attested by growing cleavages and debates over the future of integration. His thesis here is that former anti-European (in the sense of anti-integration) movements and ideas have now been incorporated and reframed into an alternative European discourse, alternative to that defended by the longstanding pro-European elites. This major cleavage - "Modern Europe" against "Fortress Europe" – has, according to Risse, become both the basis and evidence of the Europeanisation of public spheres in most European countries (at least for the EU15, UK excluded). This should therefore discourage European elites from silencing debate around major European decisions.

This thesis is clearly engaged in favour of more integration, which somewhat undermines the neutrality of the author's analysis. For instance, Risse demonstrates in Chapter 3 that Germany and Spain are the only cases in the 5 he examines (Germany, Spain, France, Poland and the UK) where public debate shows an increase in the intertwining of national and European identities amongst elites. He nevertheless begins the next chapter with the assertion (reaffirmed throughout) that the "marble cake" model has become the general trend in continental Europe. What emerges from this analysis however, is rather an increasing diversity in the evolution of national identities within the framework of European integration. It's interesting to underline here that national frames do not only influence public attitudes toward integration, but also academic approaches: the "marble cake" seems particularly "German" way of reading the situation.

More importantly however, despite the impressively wide range of references discussed in the book, the selection made by the author is partial. He notes that the qualitative research that has developed over the last two decades "sometimes leads to diverging findings" (p.37) but does not address them further than this. He does not for instance discuss Jonathan White's research, published in major European journals, that shows the profound indifference of ordinary citizens (considered through the eyes of taxi drivers in three countries) to the EU. Unable to dismiss Adrian Favell's work so lightly, Risse uses it as though it supported his thesis; as if that author's "Eurostars" were indeed clearly a Europeanised elite. Favell himself on the other hand concludes, albeit with regret, as to their enduring national attachment.

What makes the book altogether less convincing is the extent to which Risse's strong commitment to European integration impacts on his analysis of what he sees as the main new European cleavage – "Modern Europe" vs. "Fortress Europe". It leads him to see the former as enlightened, liberal, cosmopolitan and inclusionary while the latter is reactionary, nationalist, exclusionary and racist. Quoting Fligstein, Risse briefly suggests that "Fortress Europe" is defended by the losers of European integration and globalisation. What Fligstein shows are the profound inequalities generated by European integration. Risse however, depicts an anti-modern public incapable of rejoicing itself of what they lost and not wise enough to embrace the enthusiasm of the winners. *A community of Europeans?* makes us wonder if the Europhilia of many academics in European studies may not weigh too heavily on their analysis of the integration process. Risse should at least acknowledge that if "Modern Europe" is an enlightened vision, it is also an elitist one.